

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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“A Support Group and a New Creation”

Another sermon in an ongoing but nonsequential series entitled, The Mayonnaise Letters

II Corinthians 5: 16-21

March 21, 2004

It's a wonderful time to be in the business of studying the Bible... ancient texts... sacred writings. As you know, there have been discoveries in recent decades of texts that are shedding light on the biblical world and really... the whole canonical story. The Dead Sea Scrolls is, of course, one of the most significant examples of these types of findings.

Well, right behind that discovery, and I mean right behind it... a very close second are **The Mayonnaise Letters**. These amazing materials... are, what seems to be anyway, authentic letters written in response to the letters of the Apostle Paul. They were discovered in Tibet by four Tibetan Boy Scouts, hermetically sealed in a Mayonnaise jar.

It's true...

Tibetan Scouts' Honor.

They found them... in a jar... I promise.

These letters have come to be called the Mayonnaise Letters by scholars all around the world, although some scholars prefer the designation “Miracle Scripts.” The letters are being translated by a professor at the Acme Bible Institute in Paris... Texas... by the name of Uoughta B. Leery. (Uoughta is a common Cech. name, I think)

Anyway, Dr. Leery has just released another of the letters this week in a leading theological journal, The Biblical Inquirer. It's a great issue with headlines like, “**How Jesus Met Bigfoot**” and “**Extra Terrestrials Interpreting.**”

It was a good thing I came across Dr. Leery's new Mayonnaise Letter because it just happened to be in response to this week's epistle and since I was too busy to study this week and I'm just going to read this to you, if that's okay.

It starts here with a typical greeting and salutation.

I, Fortunatus, servant to the saints, faithful bearer of the gospel, and part-time sacker at Mr. Market Place.

To Paul, my dear friend in the ministry and mentor in the faith.

Grace and peace right back at you and how are you two? Tell Timothy hello for me and that I've continued to work on my duck tossing game and will be ready to take him on next time he's in town.

Speaking of Corinth, it's been wild around here as usual... never a dull moment in this metropolis, as you know. Anyway, last week the mayor announced that he would be raising taxes to fix that bad taste in our well water. That went over like a lead bagel... He's about as likely to pull that off as I am to go through circumcision... **It ain't happening.**

We haven't talked about the mayor's proposal at all at church because we've found it's better not to drag politics into this place. There are so many divergent views in a town like this and in a church like ours. We try not to talk about things that aren't essential.

There are, as you know, some difficult conversations to be had, however. Last Sunday, we had a town hall meeting about worship. Some of our older members were bothered that our younger creative types were writing new hymns.

One of the elders stood up and said with great conviction, **“If the Psalms were good enough for David, they’re good enough for me.”** Of course, they also want them sung in Hebrew... and to no new rhythms.

The younger group countered that they still loved the Psalms but wanted to sing more about Jesus. They’d written a new chorus called, **“He Is Lord.”** They actually sing it to a pop tune that’s been around for a few years, that one where the lyrics are about a young couple in love. You know the one. **“I love you and you love me... and we just get along, dandily. When we’re standing face to face, not to kiss would be a waste. I love you and you love me.”**

Their new lyric’s quite nice. You should use it. **“He is Lord, he is Lord, he is risen from the dead and he is Lord. Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.”**

Well, I know it sounds harmless but the older folks were pretty nervous about it. I was worried prior to the meeting but my fears weren’t founded. The conversation went fine... They listened to one another and it was clear they cared about the unity of our church and about each other’s need to worship. It was great to see folks acting out of something other than self-interest. That’s not the way the world works, for sure.

And that sort of brings me to my reason for writing. As you know, we’ve been working through your second epistle.

Again, thank you for writing again so soon and with such love and humility. I think what we deserved was some real tough talk. But you were so gracious.

Anyway, we’ve been getting into small groups and reading a section and talking about it together. First we get quiet and still, then we read it several times, just listen prayerfully. No one’s allowed to talk for several minutes afterwards. We’ve learned the best stuff emerges this way.

So... last week we read your thoughts about the “new creation” and God’s reconciling work in Christ. The conversation it sparked was amazing. We read the text... and sat in silence. After a few minutes, Nanoni was the first to speak.

Do you remember her? She became a follower your first trip here. She was one of the temple prostitutes there that last Sabbath. You talked with her a good while. She still talks about the way you prayed for her.

Nanoni spoke first and said that this passage was her story in a nutshell. She talked some about her life in the temple in some detail. She wasn’t really a person there... more of a implement for rituals. She got involved in that life as a young person after her parents died... not much of a choice... and when she did, she said her heart died.

But then, she came to our church... When she said that, Paul, she was choking back tears, saying how people talked to her and treated her, so nicely.

And then she heard you teach. And then she said yes to Christ, everything changed for her.

“I was a new creation... in a instant,” she said.

**“The old really was gone
and the new had come.”**

“It was as if I’d come home to God... A place I’d always belonged but never been.”

It was good to hear Nanoni’s story and her encounter with your words. I needed to hear her response to what you wrote... because they hit me so differently.

You know my story... I can’t remember not being a Christian. It doesn’t seem so “new” to me. And the “old” doesn’t seem to have passed away... I’m still dragging the “old” around.

A couple of weeks ago, Stephanas preached for me... I just needed a break. And it didn’t go so well for him. He was preaching and got lost and got long... and folks started yawning and I had the most sickening awareness.

I realized that I was glad he wasn’t doing well. The “old” was starring me in the face. So... when I hear you say, **“The old is gone and the new has come,”** I want to say back, **“How so? And I want to say, when will it... how long, O Lord?”**

I believe what you say, **“God was in Christ reconciling us all...”** and I believe he was making all things new... I just wish I could see that newness more in me.

I said all that to the group. So... we went from the high of Nanoni’s experience to my sobering honesty. Things got quiet and I was thinking maybe I shouldn’t have been so honest and vulnerable.

That’s when Doilolla spoke up. She kind of leaned back and said... **“Ya know... I can’t be sure... but it seems like Paul wants us to be thinking of Genesis here. I’m going to ask him next time he’s here, but that’s my guess. He wants us to be thinking of creation. God creates and when God creates... it’s a new world.”**

She’s sort of cosmically minded, Paul... very Greek. She talks often of the Cosmic Christ... the one before and in all things... the agent of creation... the expression of God. She’s way beyond me most of the time. But still, I like to hear her talk.

Anyway... she began to describe something... almost like she could see it in front of her. She called it a new realm... a new kingdom with different values and rules, which involved a new way of perceiving things and a new way of relating.

“It’s a new creation...” she almost shouted. **“Of course it is...”** she was on a roll. **“Wherever the Christ is... all things are made new... God in Christ is always creating.”**

Her take was that our journey is all about learning to live in that realm. It’s all about believing that this is reality and learning to live in it.

So... in about 20 minutes, the group had gone from ecstasy to agony to mystery. And that’s when Bartholomew had his epiphany. You remember Bartholomew... that artist who kept wanting you to pose for him? He’s a real open-minded soul. Bounces of the theological walls but incredibly creative.

Well, Bartholomew said that while Doilolla was talking, he had a picture in his mind. **“It’s like, he said, “everyone’s in this massive room and lots of folks are rushing around here and there. Some are walking about mindlessly. Others are very aggressive, they seem to be staking off part of the room. Some are dominating... some seem lost.”**

But... ” he stopped for a second, **“Then when I look closely, I see some of the folks are dancing. It’s like they’re in on some beautiful choreographed thing.”**

Some of them have just learned some basic steps and appear to be a little frustrated but some of them are really cutting a rug and having a blast. Some appear to almost be free styling but still in concert with everyone else. And I'm standing there watching this thinking, 'Why haven't I seen this before?' Then someone on the dance floor motions for me to come join in. They're entreating me to join in this new thing."

Paul, I tell you... our small group was jolted into collective insight. Folks kept sharing and returning to the picture of the dance.

What it was like to be new to it and feel like you have two spiritual left feet.

What it was like to be seen by nondancers as weird.

Or to be embarrassed to dance.

What it's like to begin hearing a new rhythm and realize the creation is moving to this rhythm.

What it's like to know the joy of really letting go on the dance floor and realize that the dance is dancing you and not the other way around.

It was quite a moment. And here's my take on what happened to us... it was a new creation. As we were connecting to one another, we were able to know the presence of Christ, and in Christ, the old passed away again... and the new was there... again.

And for that moment, we weren't estranged from one another or from ourselves and we knew again that we weren't estranged from God. We had been reconciled. Reconnected, **"thanks be to God."** It was a great moment that made for a great day.

I could go on but I'm running out of papyrus. Boy, this stuff is getting expensive. I just had to write and tell you about the encounter with grace we had because of your words to us. Something new was created. God's Word came to us through your words... again. We're so thankful for you and your ministry.

We're also hoping you can make another visit soon. Even Apollos wants you to come. And Achaiscus' sister Lochaiscus said you can stay with them but if you do, make sure you bring some ear plugs... The woman can talk, my friend. I know you say you're content in any state but you've never been trapped in a house with Lochaiscus.

Tell all the saints there I said, "hey" and do look for an offering from us soon for our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. We've started a campaign. It's called, **"Coins a Jingling for Jerusalem."** Thought that one up myself.

Have to stop... I've got the early shift at Mr. Market. So... Grace to you! I say it again, grace to you! I can't say it enough... grace to you, grace to you, grace to you.

I know you must be tired... and surely discouraged at times. So when you lie down tonight, remember that you are a new creation... the old will pass away.

In Christ, always,

Fortunatis.